

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR THE COLLECTION OF UNIQUELY INDIVIDUALIZED DATA AND THE ORDERING, DISPLAY AND PRINTING OF INDIVIDUALIZED ITEMS VIA A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK.

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is entitled to the benefit of Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/242,663 filed on October 24, 2000.

Cross-references to other related patent applications may be made when appropriate.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not applicable.

REFERENCE TO A MICROFICHE APPENDIX

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a computer controlled method and system for the collection of uniquely different content and printing that content on identical or uniquely different items and, more particularly, to a method and system for printing uniquely different content over the Internet using any device capable of adhering to Internet operability specifications. This invention improves existing personalization methods with the addition of individualization methods. This invention requires interoperability with printing devices that permit the successive outputting of uniquely different content. Such devices include, but are not limited to, laser and ink-jet printers. Other printing devices such as conventional printing presses that use fixed plates are not suitable.

I. Background Of Personalized Versus Individualized Printing

It is important to clarify the difference or confused use between “personalization” and “individualization.” Consider the American Heritage Dictionary’s definition for each: “personalize - 3. To have printed, engraved, or monogrammed with one’s name or initials:

personalized stationery” and “individualize -, 2. To form into a separate and distinct entity.”

Thus, this invention recognizes that the term “personalize”, in common marketing practice by the personalization industry is not identical to “individualize.”

To further clarify the difference between personalization and individualization, personalizing in the printing industry means that the user supplies one or more datum each of which is unique but is printed in combination and replicated identically on each printed item. Individualization, as described by this invention, is applied to the user who supplies a multiplicity of data where each datum is unique and desires the printing of unique distinct and separate items comprising one order.

This invention uses the phrase "uniquely individualized" to clearly differentiate it from ordinary "personalized" printing since the word personalized appears in numerous patents relating to printing. A user can order 500 business cards whose content is specified by the user. Each card is printed identically and the indicia printed on the cards is personalized. On the other hand, the subject of this invention provides for a user specifying text or graphics that are fixed (printed on each product) along with user supplied text or graphics that will vary uniquely with each subsequently printed product. (Needless to say that "serial numbering" the printed product is not relevant even though each printed product would then be uniquely individualized. This is so since serial numbering is a form of automatic indexing and is not user-supplied data.) A business card conforming to this method would include the additional fixed text of "This card has been specifically printed for [SOMENAME]." [SOMENAME] then would be found in a database of 500 intended recipient's names. This could be called the individualization database while the fixed information on the card would be in the personalization database. When these cards are printed, each card is uniquely individualized using the content of both databases. Furthermore, this invention provides for an "intelligent" combination of the fixed and variable data. Consider "This card has been specifically printed for [[Mr./Mrs.]] [SOMENAME]." This invention includes a method of examining the variable [SOMENAME] and making possible changes to the fixed text dependent variable [[Mr./Mrs.]]. One way to do this is to have another database of male names and female names. Before printing [SOMENAME], it is examined for sex and a choice of Mr. or Mrs. is adjusted in the fixed text accordingly. Another example of grammar modification, singular vs. plural, is included in the invention.

Modern printing presses use plates most often produced from a photographic process using either film or plastic materials that are created by imagesetters driven by computers. This is an extremely expensive and time-consuming process of and by itself. Often the process is chemical based and requires expensive hazardous waste material handling and disposal.

The personalization printing industry uses this technology to produce plates that are personalized to the needs of a customer but all printed product is identical. When the target print item is paper, these presses can not only produce ink on paper or flat printing, but can embellish the product to produce raised-ink (thermography) or even use the engraving process. Current print device technologies such as laser or ink-jet imprinting does not yet have the ability to replicate the aforementioned print features of plate based printing presses but have the advantage of variable output. This invention is not restricted to currently available print devices but has the ability to operate with new or future technology.

The process of creating a printed page is called page composition. It does not matter whether the target output device is a printing press or an ink-jet printer. Page composition is usually made with computers and a graphical display showing an exact replica of the final print on a computer screen. Throughout the personalization printing industry, the page composition process utilizes data stored in a database. This invention extends the scope of the database so that additional layers of database storage are used. Thus, the database would contain the basic information about an order such as the customer name and address, item to be printed, and so on. But the database would also include features to store the variable data, meaning that data which is unique and individualized for each item to be printed.

Several software products currently exist that provide for individualized printing. But these products require that the database, data entry mechanism, and print device be utilized on the same computer. These products are thus, stand-alone software applications without Internet interoperability.

II. Background Of The Internet

The Internet consists of a plethora of computers and computer networks all interconnected using various communication links. These can be wired, radio frequency, by any means, or even optical. The Internet relies on certain communication standards and certain